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Reply to: **Tampa**

April 5, 2001

**MAN SENTENCED TO THIRTY SEVEN MONTHS**  
**FOR INTERFERENCE WITH FLIGHT CREW**

Tampa - United States District Court Judge Susan C. Bucklew today sentenced MANUEL SOTO to 37-months in federal prison on charges that he interfered with a flight crew. Back on December 5, 2001, SOTO, age 41 of New York City, New York, appeared before Magistrate Judge Thomas G. Wilson and pled guilty to interference with a flight crew and attendants on September 7, 2001.

On September 7, 2001, the defendant was aboard U.S. Airways MetroJet flight 2663 en route from La Guardia International Airport to Tampa International Airport. While on that flight, the defendant intimidated the flight crew and attendants by verbally assaulting them, putting them in fear of their safety, and by being disruptive, tempestuous and intimidating. Additionally, while the defendant was on the plane and after being subdued by off-duty law enforcement officers, he made the statement that the "plane was going to crash" and "he was going to heaven because God loved him." This statement, along with the defendant's behavior, caused chaos among the passengers, interfering with the flight crew and the attendants' normal in-flight jobs.

United States Attorney Paul I. Perez stated: "Passenger and flight crew safety is a top priority and we will continue to aggressively prosecute those who are disruptive and put peoples lives at risk in the skies above our nation."

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney John F. Rudy, III.